

# Communities, health-care organizations and the contingencies and contradictions of engagement: A case study from Chile

Montenegro CR, Mercado N. Communities, health-care organizations and the contingencies and contradictions of engagement: A case study from Chile. *Health Expect.* 2020;23:229–237. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12996>

## Abstract

**Context** Despite a growing interest in service-user involvement in mental health services, the interaction between health institutions and local groups is only beginning to receive attention, particularly in global south settings.

**Objective** Looking at a participatory initiative in Chile, this study explores how, under unfavourable administrative conditions, health organizations approach and work with communities.

**Methods** We interviewed policy-makers (5), local professionals (10), service users and community representatives (6) linked to a concrete participatory initiative. Participant observation in relevant meetings helped to enrich the interpretations. Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts and field notes.

**Findings** The findings present a sequence of actions starting with the creation of a network of community-based groups. A set of problems ensued, related to the group's diversity, internal representation, decision-making and funding processes. In response, professionals implemented simultaneously bureaucratic and democratic adjustments, developing a vision of community that ignored the particularities?including the motivations?of local groups.

**Discussion and conclusion** Based on these findings, we argue that participatory initiatives should be studied as on-going achievements shaped by broad policy orientations and local configurations of interest. In the process, they produce ad hoc forms of knowledge and visions of community that provide orientation to the agents involved.

## KEY WORDS

Chile, community participation, community-institutional relations, decision making, mental health services, organizational, self-help groups, service-user involvement